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Goose Lake Prairie

STATE NATURAL AREA

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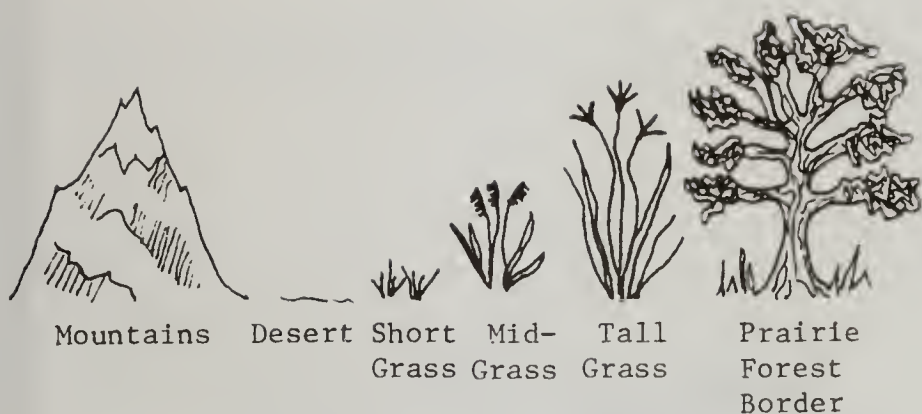
GOOSE LAKE PRAIRIE STATE NATURAL AREA

Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area is in Grundy County about 60 miles southwest of Chicago and two miles south of the Illinois River. The original purchase of 240 acres of land was made by the state in 1969. Later additions have brought the total acreage to 2,600 acres. Approximately 1,537 acres are dedicated as Illinois Nature Preserve.

THE “PRAIRIE STATE”

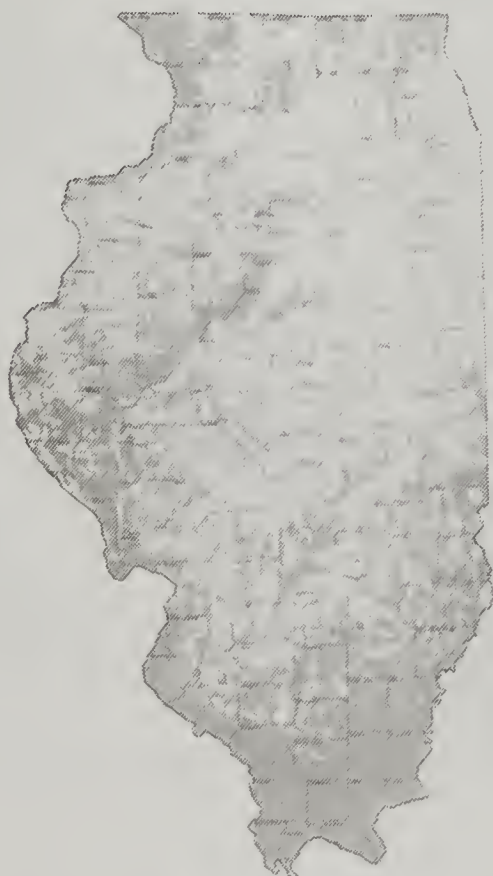
Goose Lake Prairie, one of the largest prairies in the United States, is the largest remnant of prairie left in Illinois, the “Prairie State.” As such, it is a historical, as well as natural importance. Illinois was once almost three-fourths covered by prairie; now these grasslands have been converted to croplands. This state today is very different from the frontier out of which pioneers struggled to make a living. Goose Lake Prairie is a reminder of the environment with which Illinois Indians and settlers had to contend: a place of grasses, wildflowers, fires, and seemingly ceaseless prairie winds.

Prairie, what is it? Prairie came from the French word for meadow. The French explorers and English settlers had no other word to describe the open, grass-covered, treeless landscape found in middle North America. Thus, the name prairie was developed. Prairies are composed of grasses and almost absent of trees. The North American Prairie was a continuous grassland that ran from Indiana to the Rockies. It stretched between the forest and the desert. The amount of moisture determining the grasses' height. Now that landscape is farmland.



Some grasses of importance to Goose Lake Prairie are big bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass, prairie dropseed, and little bluestem. Wildflowers include spring forbs such as violets, shooting star, and blue-eyed grass. These give way in summer to false indigo and blazing star and in the fall to sunflowers, asters, and goldenrods.

Goose Lake Prairie is a haven for wildlife. Wild ducks and geese concentrate on the marshland in spring and fall. Rare species such as Henslow' sparrow are common here. The plains pocket gopher inhabits the area as well as larger mammals such as deer and coyote.



PRAIRIE'S PAST INHABITANTS

Indian: Goose Lake Prairie, at one time, was the home of the buffalo, wolf, prairie chicken, and otter. Early tribes of mound-building Indians dwelt near the area. When the city of Morris northwest of the park was being built, 19 mounds were uncovered there and more were found just south of the Illinois River. Later, tribes of the Illini Confederation settled in the area where they farmed and grew corn,

squash, and beans. The Potawatomi, who were one of the first to establish trade with the French, were the last tribe to be found near Goose Lake. The tribes chief, Shabbona, gained notoriety for coming to the aid of settlers during the 1832 Black Hawk War. Despite his services, Shabbona's tribe was forced to move to a reservation in Kansas in 1836. Shabbona later returned to Illinois and is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery near Morris.

Settlers: Pioneers found many hardships waiting for them when they settled in the prairies of Illinois, as well as the Goose Lake area. The pioneer families who settled in the Goose Lake area included the Collins and Holdermans, who at one time or another owned much of the present state park. The land was grazed by cattle and some was put to plow. William S. Miller, whose family owned the land where the Visitor Center presently is, described the Goose Lake area as almost treeless when he was growing up, but cattle grazing and the lack of fire allowed hawthorn trees to invade the prairie.

The lake, Goose Lake, where is it today? The lake itself no longer exists. It was drained just before the turn of the century for farming and the mining of valuable clay underneath. In its day, it was 1,000 acres of water, so covered with ducks and geese that the water was not visible, hence its name — Goose Lake. What remains is a series of ponds, potholes, and marshes. The Tallgrass Nature Trail goes through one of the ponds and marsh areas.

FACILITIES

Visitor Center — A large center with information counter, display area, auditorium, and washrooms. Multi-media presentations and programs are available. Call about schedule or check at information counter.

Trails — The Tallgrass Nature Trail winds one and one-half miles through the prairie and it's potholes and marshes. Trail guides with numbered paragraphs which correspond to the numbered posts along the trail are available for use.

In winter, there are cross-country ski trails. The trails travel through open prairie. Maps and warmth are available at the Visitor Center.

Cragg's Cabin — This is a replica of the log cabin built by John Cragg in 1834-35. The cabin, nicknamed the "Palace" because of its two-story design, was one of the first in Grundy County. It was a station on the underground railroad. The Youth Conservation Corps built the cabin.

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Programs — Year-round programs are designed to provide activities for the visitor and relate him/her to their environment and natural resources. Guided hikes, lectures, and slide shows are available. Contact the Park Interpreter.

Picnicking — There are two areas with tables, grills, and toilets. One area called "Prairie Grove" has water and shelters.

Heidecke State Fish & Wildlife Area — This area is adjacent to and managed by Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area for hunting and fishing programs. Heidecke Lake is a Commonwealth Edison cooling lake which has been leased to the Department of Conservation.

Boats — Only boats for fishing or duck hunting are allowed on the lake. No water skiing, swimming, sailboating, or wading is allowed. All boats must have a gasoline-powered motor as a main propulsion unit.

For duck hunting, all boats must be at least 16' in length and have at least a 60" beam with the duck blind built on the boat.

Concessionaire — A concessionaire has boats for rent and bait for sale. The location is near the boat launching area.

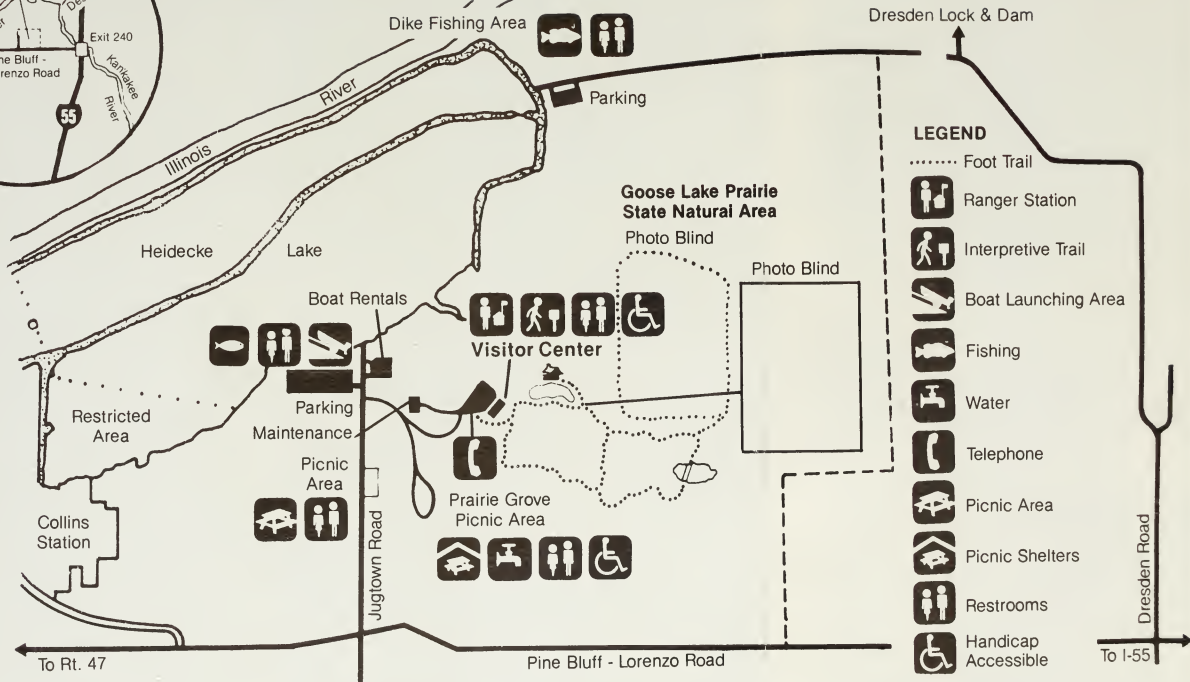
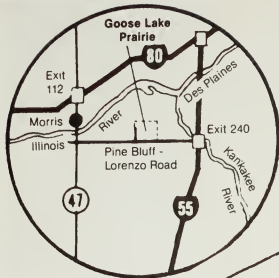
Fishing — Since 1978, the lake has been stocked with walleye, striped bass, largemouth bass, muskellunge, and catfish. Other fish in the lake include carp, bluegill, and bullhead. special lake regulations are in effect. Contact site for more details. The fishing season opens on or about April 1st each spring and closes two weeks before duck hunting season. There is an area for bank fishing.

Duck Hunting — Water sites are allocated each morning by a lottery drawing 90 minutes before sunrise. The lake is closed to hunting on Monday and Tuesday. Shooting hours are from ½ hour before sunrise to 12:00 noon.

Deer Hunting — Bow and arrow and shotgun hunting are available. Hunting fact sheets are available for each program.

Dove Hunting — Hunting is available during the first 15 days of dove season. Hunting fact sheets are available at the Visitor Center.

For more information, please call (815) 942-6352.



FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state site unless permission from the site superintendent has been obtained to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

All state sites are open year-round, except Christmas Day and New Year's Day. When weather con-

ditions necessitate the closing of roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to facilities is by foot only.

For more details about this site, contact the Site Superintendent, 5010 North Jugtown Road, Morris, Illinois 60450, phone — Goose Lake Prairie State Natural Area - (815) 942-2899 or Heidecke State Fish and Wildlife Area - (815) 942-6352. For information on other state sites, write the Illinois De-

partment of Conservation, 524 S. Second Street, Springfield, Illinois 62706.

